

A FLIP THROUGH MY SCHOOL HISTORY BOOKS: WHY I MUST UNLEARN WHAT I LEARNT TO RELEARN

ROLAND NDILLE

University of Buea, SWR, Cameroon

Cognition is brought about by the presence of the known object in the knower(s) mind(s). But the object is in the knower(s) after the fashion of the knower(s). Hence, for any knower(s), knowledge is after the fashion of his (their) own nature (Summa Theologia., I, Q. xii, a. 4 in Cahn, 1995:409”).

ABSTRACT

I have been teaching history at secondary and university levels in Cameroon for about fifteen years now. I have also been engaged in teacher training and I work on a regular basis with primary school teachers from where I have had time to study what is on the primary school syllabus and experience what goes on in the classes and training institutions. However, it is my exposure to Decolonial studies that signalled to me that there is a problem with what we have been learning and teaching as history in Cameroon schools. This exposure has since been the base of my writing in educational historiography for which I offer here, a personal reflection of my learning of history in Cameroon. I tell the story of the evolution of the history curriculum to present and the motives which have guided contents choice in history in Cameroon. In terms of transformation which is the major essence in most research writings, I hope to use my narrative to influence others learning, understanding and reconstruction of the social formations in which we live. This influence is expected to arrive at a point where we ask and answer the famous question ‘what should we do?’ This is what I call learning to unlearn in order to relearn.

KEYWORDS: School History Books

INTRODUCTION

Like most positivist undertakings in history, my account is expected to inform readers about the history education timeline in Cameroon and to a larger extent, ‘post-colonial’ Africa. Hopefully, in answering the question ‘what should we do?’ this narrative offers insights which would bring about transformation as a social justice project. By unlearning to relearn, I offer a contribution to the process of shifting the geography of reasoning as in Lewis Gordon’s formulation (Gordon 2006) of disengaging from the assumption that certain ‘areas’ are objects to be studied to who is doing the studying and for what reason. I argue that we (Africans) can make no form of affirmation without being involved and transformed in our act of affirming (Kusch 1978 in Tlostanova and Mignolo, 2012). That is, moving from being the enunciated (object/area to be described and explained) to being the enunciator (the subject doing the description and explanation). I do this because there is this ideological assumption in mainstream epistemology which holds that subjects who are not euro-Americans are mere tokens of their own culture (Tlostanova and Mignolo, 2012). This implies that knowledge is located in a given area (Western Europe and the US) and controlled by certain people (the circular white quantitative minority). This is important to me as a Decolonial historiographer in terms of my purpose of not only

disobeying such taken-for-granted assumptions but in positioning myself (and others in this project) as an epistemic subject who takes on the world from my own culture and experiences.

In this case, I (the subject of study) take as an object of study, the history curriculum as a western imperial formation within the context of missionary/colonial education, which for a long time has affected me and other peripheral subjects through its creation of institutions of knowledge that became imperially, the measure of all possible knowledges. These are the same institutions that the peripheries inherited after 'independence' and which have stayed with them since then. I discuss the impact that such an inheritance has had on me and other Africans as epistemic subjects. In this effort I disagree with the supposed modernist assumptions of the supposed impact of the western imperial formations (in this case the inherited school contents) and in a typical Decolonial fashion suggest a new way forward for history contents in our African schools. Like Samir Amin (1968), Tlostanova and Mignolo (2012) Ndille (2012), Ramoupi (2014), Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2013) and Ramoupi and Ndille (2015) would agree, this new way forward is a disobedience of and delinking from modernist perceptions of the impact that western epistemology is said to have had on Africa and suggest alternative ways of looking at curriculum and its relevance in an African setting.

Living Theory as Methodology

The desire to transform the contents of my consciousness into a public form so that others can understand them in the way I want them understood completely made redundant the assumption that the traditional social science research methodologies are the exclusive agents of establishing meaning or acquiring new epistemology (Eisner, 1988). While I hold that traditional approaches represent another form of the imposition of western centric epistemology on the world, I also believe that all these methods and forms of representation are partial and because they are partial, they limit, the expression of individual experiences (in Charles, 2007:74). As a sign of disobedience, I began exploring the potentials of other forms of representation which acknowledge a variety of new ways through which my experiences can be retrieved and coded (Slattery, 1997).

In this search I came across two remarks which strengthened my resolve; the first being that "methods must not prescribe problems; rather problems must prescribe methods (Gumede 2011:60-61)" and the second being that "every man is his own methodologist!" (Mills in Bullough & Pinnegar, 2001:13). These confirm my initial position that knowledge of my experiences can be arrived at using idiosyncratic perspectives and can be presented as such on condition that 'one ensures that his/her feet face the right direction' (Edgard Sienaert: in Gumede, 2011:61). This certainly means recounting my own experiences in the most appropriate manner as a way of representing the experiences of all those who have had history education in Cameroon and as a way of presenting the evolution of the history curriculum.

This approach to research and report writing is what some professionals have termed living theory; a disciplined process of inquiring into the self by the self, thinking about one's own life and work as a practitioner so that one can continue developing oneself, one's work; that of others and by so doing make significant changes in society (Whitehead 2008:104). I believe that by sharing varied experiences with the world, we would be improving each other's practice and as we do this, a new frame for conceptualizing educational knowledge in Africa is expected to be created and developed. Living theory embraces a healthy balance between intellectualism and social change (McLaren, 1998, in Barry 2012:3). It is believed that the intellect must also develop the skills and habits of being an effective thinker, a problem solver, and having skills and knowledge relevant to the culture within which one lives (Gardner, 2000). I also understand social change as referring to change that leads our society towards a new epistemic ingenuity not as a result of borrowing but as a conscious

departure from western-centric frames to more pure, just, imaginative and creative humanistic ways of being.

As an educational research method, living theory is a platform in which individuals express their concerns when their values are not being lived as fully as they wish. These reflections generate possibilities for living their values more fully; they chose an action plan and act on it, gather data to make a judgment on their effectiveness; they evaluate their influence in relation to their values, skills and understandings; they modify their concerns, imagine possibilities and actions in the light of their evaluations (in Barry, 2012:2). This approach fits squarely into my frame of learning to unlearn in order to relearn. From the definition, I understand that, a living theory research approach demonstrates profound respect for the educational researcher as an agent of educational change and improvement.

Primary School: The Beginning ‘often Termed Humble’

I am a native of *Bakossi*, the major ethnic group that makes up the *Kupe-Manenguba* Division of the Southwest Region of Cameroon. I was born in the late 1970s. Then my father Ntongwe Damasius Ndille was a probationary teacher in the service of the Roman Catholic Mission (RCM) in the village elementary school; *Ave Maria RCM School*, where I followed him every morning and sat in his class (class 1). We didn’t learn any history in this class since history as a school subject began in class five and most village schools ended in class two or three). After an inspection of our teeth and body and sometimes a cold bath in the village stream amidst wailing (for the water was really cold and most of my friends couldn’t brave the morning cold to take a bath before coming to school) we spent the rest of our school day reciting rhymes, singing, drawing, sweeping the dusty compound and doing some Arithmetic

To me the most important and interesting part of the school day was the rhyme lessons which my dad delivered with all enthusiasm. One of the most popular ones I remember vividly was *London Bridge is falling down; falling down, falling down, London Bridge is falling down....* I grew up to know that London was the administrative headquarters of the United Kingdom, the source of our school language and the motherland of our former masters but never understood why their bridge would be falling down every morning until I visited a friend there from Falun (Sweden) when I was studying for the Master of Arts in African Studies. Others like *seven green bottles standing on the wall* kept me even more marveled.

Years later, I kept wondering why my dad didn’t go to secondary school despite his intelligence only to be reminded of the intrigues of the British colonial government to limit native education as much as possible. They strongly held the idea that, too much learning, would be both superfluous and dangerous for the clerks, messengers, elementary school teachers and other support staff whom they hoped to make the Africans become. I read from N. N. Mbile (1999, 6-7) that this was ‘a determination by Britain to prevent the development of a Southern Cameroonian elite class.’ He reveals that ‘many Europeans living in African territories hated educated Africans for being cocky.

My dad however, soon got fed up with teaching in the village school where other things such as witchcraft, very poor coffee returns of the late 1970s and the desire to give his children education beyond the first four years of elementary school pushed him to join the penitentiary administration in 1980. We started off in the then Far North Province (in 2008 all provinces became regions in line with the 1996 constitution). My dad was frequently transferred from Mora to Maroua and then to Garoua and Poli. It thought it was the practice then that men in uniform never stayed long in one station especially when they were still young in service. The towns in the north were not only extremely hot and desert-like, but were very different from my home village and region. The first journey from my native Nteho II village to

Mora took a week by train and bus. As a boy whose furthest trip had been the twenty kilometer trek to Bangem, the headquarters of our subdivision, I was encountering such modes of transport for the first time and vomited all the way.

Arriving Northern Cameroons, my brothers, sisters and I, were quickly registered into French speaking schools. Apart from the Madrasas (Koranic schools) there was no other choice as there was no English speaking school in the area. Being still in junior elementary, there was again no history on the curriculum. We however recited rhymes which emotionally upheld the French heritage of this part of Cameroon. We sang that the *Gauls* (French) are our ancestors and praised General de Gaulle and Philip Le Clerk for liberating us from Hitler's occupation. Huge statues of them still stand imposing in major avenues in our city centers. In the mid 1980s we moved to the capital city Yaoundé where apart from leaving the heat of the north, nothing changed in terms of school.

Luck came our way when my father was transferred to Kumba; the chief economic town of the South-West Region. This town was not only the junction town to our village but enabled us to be reintroduced to English styled schools and curricula. We studied history for the last three years of the seven years primary school course. Our history text books were the famous *History of Cameroon for primary schools* by S. N Tita books *one, two and three for classes five, six and seven respectively*. We saw Mr. S. N Tita as a great historian; being the pioneer Cameroonian to venture into textbook writing and printing for the elementary school system in Anglophone Cameroon. He also wrote books like *Nature study*, *Domestic Science* and *Rural science for Senior Primary Classes in Cameroon*.

I was lucky to find copies of the *History for Cameroon* for primary schools by SN Tita as well as the 1963 and 1968 schemes of work for primary school history in the National Archives Buea. The contents of these two documents are so similar that I still have found it difficult to conclude whether the book was written from the schemes or the book determined the schemes. In the absence of my history note books which were probably used as tissue paper for our latrine soon after I passed the exams, the details of both the schemes and Mr Tita's book which I present hereunder would tell you the kind of history I learnt in primary school in Cameroon. What has also caught my attention is the fact that from our prescribed textbook (SN Tita's book) the primary school history curriculum in Cameroon in my days (late 1980s) was exactly that of the 1963 syllabus. Apparently, for close to thirty years, little or no syllabus revision had taken place. In fact it was in 2001 that a new syllabus was adopted and Mr Tita's history book title changed to *New History of Cameroon* (2001)

Table 1: The Main History Topics in my Primary School

Class Five	Class Six	Class Seven
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The study of pupils parents, origins, tribes, migrations etc 2. The past and present great men of the locality (stories, legends) 3. The Early man; His way of life, his housing, clothing and food, his family 4. The beginning of civilization; The herdsman and shepherd, the domestication of animals/agriculture 5. Division of historic time into generations, centuries and eras 6. The Egyptian civilization 7. The Babylonian Civilization 8. The Great Discoveries; Hieroglyphics, cuneiform, papyrus etc 9. Hammurabi and the code of laws 10. The discovery and use of metal 11. How men learned to make ships and sail on rivers Nile/Tigris/ Euphrates 12. Trade by barter/advent of money 13. The Geek Civilization; Sparta/Athens 14. The Peloponnesian wars etc 15. Prominent men in Ancient Greece 16. The Roman Empire 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The Great Religions; Judaism 2. The Great Religions; Christianity 3. St. Augustine, Pope Gregory 4. The Barbarian Invasion of the Rome 5. The Dark Ages 6. The Great Religions; Islam 7. The spread of Islam from Arabia 8. The battle of Tours in France 9. European Recovery From the Dark ages; the monks, Charlemagne, papal powers 10. The Middle Ages; St. Francis of Assisi, St Joan of Arc 11. The Crusades to the Holy land; King Richard the Lion Heart and Saladin 12. The Protestant Reformation; Calvin, Hus, Zwingli, Luther 13. The Counter Reformation; St Francis Xavier, St. Ignatius Loyola 14. The Voyages of Discovery; Henry the Navigator, Columbus, Da Gama, Diaz, Magellan, Francis Drake 15. The fall of Constantinople to Turks 16. The Renaissance arts, literature, science 17. 16. The discovery and spread of printing- John Gutenberg, Caxton etc 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. America; Life on the American plantations, Civil War, abolition acts 2. Abolition of Slave trade; Wilberforce, Lincoln, Sharp and effects of 3. Industrial Rev/legitimate trade 4. The Age of exploration in Africa, Mungo Park, Clapperton, The Lander Brothers, Barth, Stanley, Livingstone 5. Division of History into time 6. The age of antiquity; Egypt, Babylon, Persia, Carthage, Greece, Rome 7. The movement of people from Asia into Africa (Semites/Arabs/ Berbers) 8. Europe; middle ages /the crusades 9. Empires of Western Sudan 10. Great; Inventions; Printing, Navigation, Manufacturing/building 11. The French Rev and King Louis XIV 12. The American Revolution 13. The Fulani of North Cameroon 14. The Fang Migration from Gabon 15. Independent African states and the World today; UNO, Great Powers, Space exploration etc

In terms of how much of my own (Cameroon) history I learnt in primary school, one can only deduce by a hand count of the topics that have to do with Cameroon on Table 1 above. But I spare you the strain with the pie chart hereunder;

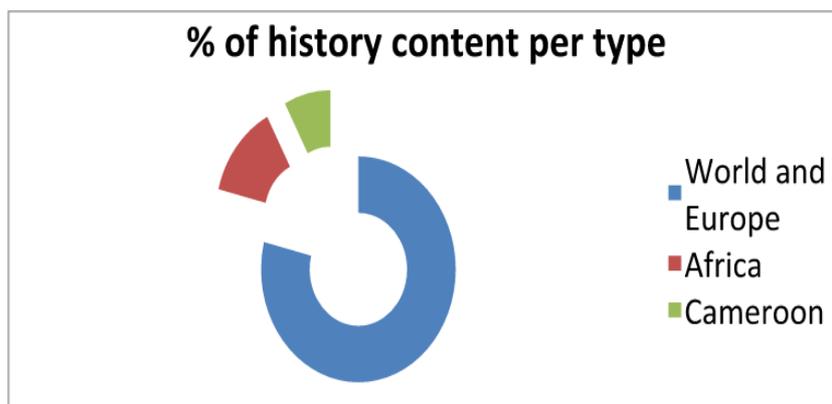


Figure 1

I wrote the First School Leaving Certificate examination set on this curriculum in the late 1980s, more than thirty years after independence when most African leaders had declared the importance and need to indigenize/Africanize school curricula. I remember vividly our first president Amadou Ahidjo’s message which sounded like a warning that;

We must shun all servile importing and transplanting of foreign systems. The structure and substance of our educational system must consult the environment, needs, and personality of the Cameroonian people (quoted in Ndille 2012, 15)

Such calls which were proliferate throughout Africa in the heels of independence (Bangura 2005) demonstrate that there was an increasing interest in the study of indigenous knowledge and a general agreement to revise curricula to reflect the African rich knowledge bases. The primary school syllabuses in Cameroon however show that change had not been achieved when I graduated from Government Practicing School Group II Kumba Town; one of the four government schools that the British and later the Cameroon government inherited from the Germans.

‘Junior’ Secondary School: Foxes Dancing without Music

I was registered into the Government Bilingual Secondary School at Up-Station Kumba (my house was directly opposite the school). For the five years leading to the *General Certificate of Education Ordinary Level (GCE-O/L)* Examination, the history we studied had still, very little of local knowledge. From the general objectives of the national syllabuses, it was clear that the consciousness of the importance of local history had not crept significantly into the minds of policy makers and curriculum reformers. The objectives for history ‘were set at developing in the students, a love for the past; a critical, literary and oratorical ability (Cameroon, 1963, 12). There was nothing in it regarding cultural heritage, patriotism and national integration. Little wonder that, like that of the primary school, indigenous knowledge was out of the question.

In form One, we were baptised ‘foxes with long tails’ and hard to regularly dance without music if a senior felt like being entertained. The contents of the history programme included, an introduction to history, history of ancient civilizations such as Mesopotamia, Greece and Rome. Our history textbook (I still have a copy) was *The Story of the Ancient World* by H. A. Clement (first Edition, 1936). After learning to define history and answering the question ‘why we study history?’ we were immediately introduced to the great civilizations of the world. From Clement’s book our teacher enthusiastically taught us about the first men that;

They appeared about 600,000 years ago. We do not know very much about them, as only a few remains, like skulls have been discovered. The oldest of these was found in Java, an island in the East Indies while others have been found in Heidelberg and Neanderthal, in Germany. They could light fires, as ashes have been discovered along with their remains. They also made rough stone implements (Clement, 1981, 20-21 Reprint).

Reference here is made of the Stone Age man but as if to confirm Marx’s theory of world history beginning from the east, through Europe and ending in North America, what Clement did was that he completely denied Africa that pride of place as the cradle of mankind. Later on I came across the huge book *Western Civilizations* edited by Noble and Staus and the idea was not different. Noble and Straus tell that the ancestors of man first lived in caves and that the first ever evidence of human-like creatures living in caves were discovered at Lascaux Cave in Southern France (Noble and Straus, 1994, p.4). According to them;

The best known archaic people are the Neanderthals named after the valley of the Neander river in modern Germany where their remains were first found in 1856. Neanderthals however were not modern humans. Modern people began emerging about 200,000 years ago and the first signs have been

discovered so far in Lascaux cave in southern France (Nobel, Straus et al, 1994:4-5).

Through such books our lessons on the Great Civilizations taught us that that Europe and not Africa was the cradle of civilization. As if carved right out of the textbooks, the lesson on great civilizations in Form One did not start with Egypt that we now know was the cradle of civilization. We learned that,

‘Civilization’ is not easy to define. The Neolithic towns after 7000BC made considerable achievements. A Mesopotamian city-state of around 3000BC, however, represents a new phenomenon: a complex society, characterized by considerable social, economic, and class hierarchy. It included formal political and religious institutions. Its monumental architecture created a large, urban space, and technological innovation reshaped its agricultural hinterland. It had developed writing for the purpose of record keeping. These make up the number of reasons that the city-states of Mesopotamia are able to be called the first civilization.... Shortly afterwards this civilization spread to the valley of the Nile River in Egypt (Nobel, Straus et al, 1994:7). The Egyptian civilization was presented as an out-crop of Mesopotamia. In Form two (the second year), we started the year with the history of Islam,. Thereafter we studied the three Empires of Western Sudan for about three weeks and quickly moved again into the history of Europe in the Middle Ages, Ancient China and Japan and the Americas. Again there was nothing about Cameroon.

Table 2: Summary of the Junior Secondary School History Syllabus

	Content/Distribution
Wk	FORM ONE
01	What is history? aims of history
02	Sources of history
03	Time in history (How time is reckoned; days, weeks, months years, decade, generations, centuries, ages, periods
04	How the world is formed; scientific and biblical accounts
05	Stages in the physical development of the Early man
	The Early man and his activities, the stone ages
06	Mesopotamia
07	The achievements of Sumerians, Babylonians, Assyrians, Chaldeans
08	Egyptian civilization; the formation of two kingdoms and unification
09	Achievements of the Egyptian civilization
10	Hebrews; early history to Abraham to Captivity
11	Crete: the Civilization of Crete
12	The Greeks; Legends, Rise of city states, Greek civilization
13	The Persian Empire, the Persian Wars
14	The Roman Empire; Beginning, Punic Wars, Roman Civilization, Fall of Rome
15	India; Ancient Empires; achievements, religion, arts, government etc
16	China; the rise of the Chinese Empire; Chinese civilization
17	The wonders of the ancient world
	FORM TWO
01	Islam
02	The rise and spread of Islam
03	The Empires of Western Sudan
04	Ancient Ghana
05	Mali
06	Songhai
07	Europe in the Middle Ages
08	The Dark Ages and the Babarian Invasion

09	Feudalism
10	The Crusades
11	The age of Explorations (Europe conquers the World)
12	The Voyages of Discovery
13	The Great Inventions
14	The Renaissance
15	The Reformation and Counter Reformation
16	The age of Enlightenment
17	The Age of Imperialism

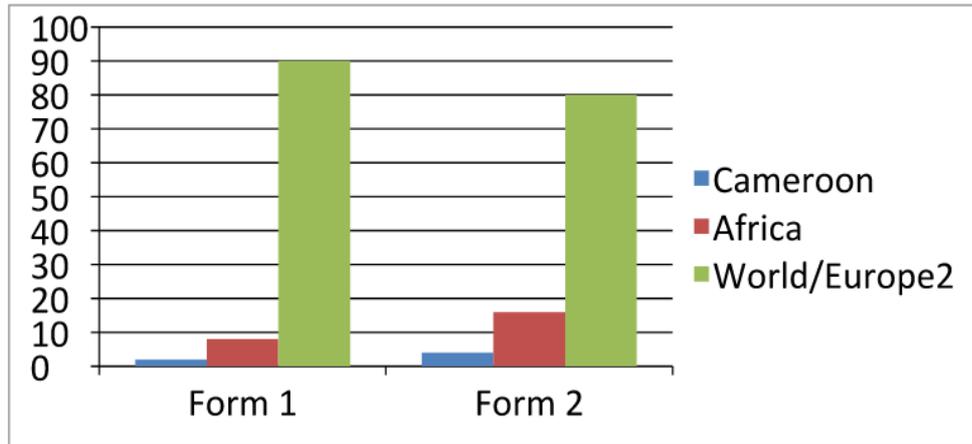


Figure 2

Senior Secondary and High School: The Race for the General Certificate of Education

As from the third year of secondary school in Cameroon, the orientation was towards the GCE and those who intended to take the subject at the GCE began studying the GCE syllabus. Students in Cameroon secondary and high schools were expected to take the London GCE Ordinary level at the end of the fifth year of secondary education and the London GCE Advanced Level at the end of their seventh year. Until 1977 the syllabus in operation in Cameroon had been the Overseas Syllabus of the London General Certificate of Education broken up as follows.

Table 5.7: London GCE History Syllabuses for Overseas Candidates

S.N	Syllabus	Area of Concern
Ordinary Level		
1	HIS. 261: Syllabus A	English History from AD 871-1763
2	His. 262: Syllabus B	English History 1760-1955/ European History 1789-1954 or combined English/European history
3	His. 263: Syllabus C	World History since 1919
4	His. 264: Syllabus D	West Indian History since 1492
5	His. 265: Syllabus E	United States History since 1607
6	His. 826: Alternative O/L	Methodology, Sources, Historiography and Philosophy of history related/ Thematic studies
Advanced Level		
1	His. 266: Syllabus A	English History 1066-1932, Europe 800-1954
2	His. 267: Syllabus B	World History 1095-1939, England 450-1955
3	His. 268: Syllabus C	Outlines of English History 450-1955, Outlines of European History 800-1954
4	His. 269: Syllabus D	Contemporary world Affairs since 1919

Source: University of London General Certificate of Education Examination June 1964 and January 1965, DELESEC Buea.

From the table one can observe clearly that there was neither any Cameroonian nor African history on the programme of the London GCE. In 1977, the Cameroon government nationalized the GCE. Consequently between 1977 and 1993 when I took the examination, it was produced and administered by the Ministry of National Education in Cameroon. Surprisingly, the nationalization of the certificate examination did not affect the examination content. That of the London Overseas Certificate curriculum continued to be implemented with very little modifications. As far as senior secondary and high school history was concerned, the Cameroon GCE operated two syllabuses; Syllabus B and Syllabus C at the Ordinary Level and Syllabus C and D at the Advanced level. Most of the schools in the then Northwest Province (today Region) offered syllabus B at the Ordinary Level and Syllabus C at the Advanced Level while those in the Southwest Province offered syllabus C at the Ordinary Level and syllabus D at the Advanced Level.

However, students, especially internal candidates were not given the latitude to choose the syllabus. They simply followed the one offered by the school. Therefore a candidate in the Southwest who wished to study syllabus B at Ordinary level and C at the advanced level had to attend a school in the Northwest Province. This disparity in curriculum choice posed serious problems to students from the two provinces when they entered university to read history in Cameroon. It also made it difficult for candidates to switch from one syllabus to another in case they felt disinterested with the previous one. There was therefore the need for a harmonized system for the two provinces. The contents for the various syllabuses are outlined in the tables below.

Table 5.8: Content of the Syllabus B GCE Ordinary Level (London GCE 1964-1976 and MINEDUC 1977-1993)

	Content
	English History 1760-1846
	English History 1830-1914
	English History 1902-1955
	English History 1760-1914
	English History 1815-1955
	European History 1763-1914
	European History 1848-1954
	Total

Table 5.9 Content of Syllabus C GCE Ordinary Level (London GCE 1964-1976, MINEDUC 1977-1993)

	Section A: Asia, including Japan, China, the Indian subcontinent, South East Asia and Australasia
	Section B: Africa and the Middle east
	Section C: The USSR and Eastern Europe
	Section D: The USA and the Americas
	Section E: Western Europe, including Britain
	Section F: General, International Relations, Institutions and Developments, Underdevelopment, technology, arts etc

Table 5.10 Content of Syllabus C GCE Advanced Level (London GCE 1964-1976, MINEDUC 1977-1993)

	Paper One
	Outlines of English History 450-1066
	Outlines of English History 1066-1399
	Outlines of English History 1399-16003
	Outlines of English History 1603-1760
	Outlines of English History 1760-1865

	Outlines of English History 1865-1955
	Paper Two
	Outlines of European History 800-1250
	Outlines of European History 1250-1450
	Outlines of European History 1450-1648
	Outlines of European History 1648-1763
	Outlines of European History 1763-1870
	Outlines of European History 1870- 1954

Table 5.11 Content of Syllabus D GCE Advanced Level (London GCE 1964-1976, MINEDUC 1977-1993)

	Paper One: International Problems since 1931
	The failure of collective security in the 1930
	The causes of the Second World War in 1939
	The collapse of Europe 1939-1941
	International relations in the Pacific 1931-1941
	War and Diplomacy 1941-1945
	The United nations Organization
	The Cold War in Europe and elsewhere
	The USA, the USSR and China as world powers
	The decline of European Imperialism
	International, social and economic problems
	Plural societies; race relations; development and aid;
	Population; pollution; liberty and order
	Paper two: The world since 1945
	Section A: Europe; The USSR
	Section B: Africa, the Middle, India and Pakistan
	Section C: China, Japan, South East Asia and Australasia
	Section D: the Americas including the Caribbean

For syllabus B ordinary level and C advanced level which were en-vogue in the schools in the northwest region, the contents was entirely European and British History. At Government Bilingual Secondary School-Kumba and CCAS-Kumba (Southwest Region) where I took the GCE Ordinary and Advanced level respectively, we studied the World Affairs Syllabuses (C at the Ordinary and D for advanced level). As seen above These syllabuses were organized into sections made up of Africa and the Middle East; India and Pakistan; Europe and the USSR; China and Japan; and the USA and the Americas. While the Africa and the Middle East section required us to study some Cameroon history, very few teachers touched this section. We therefore left high school with a very limited knowledge of the history of Cameroon. Of the 21 Essay type questions asked in the history paper each year, only two were drawn from Cameroon History. Paper Two of Syllabus D of the Advanced level had 32 questions again only two were set on Cameroon history. This made up only 06.3% of the tested syllabus. Even the Ministry of National Education (MINEDUC) which was charged with the administration of the examination did nothing to nationalize the examination content. The Cameroon General Certificate Examination Board was created in 1993 to organize examinations in Anglophone Cameroon, but it was not until 1997, that content revision and structural changes were made in the history examination in Cameroon.

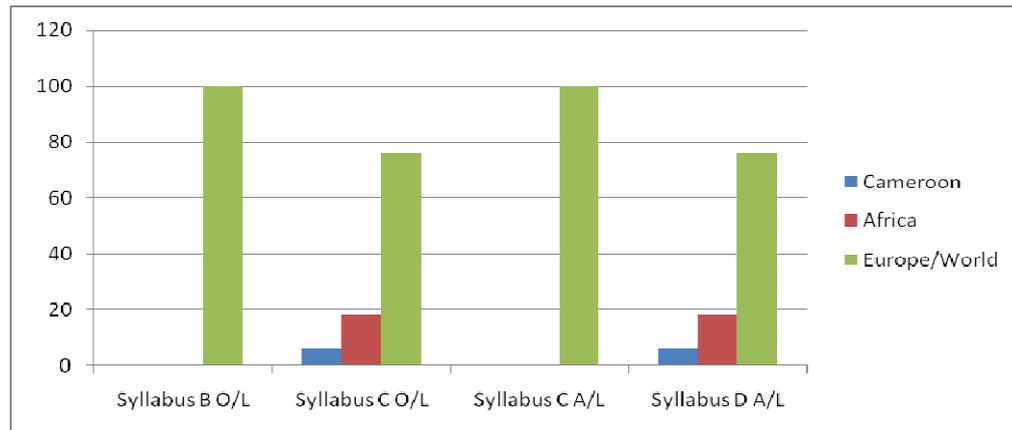


Figure 3: Structure of History Content between 1964 and 1997

The history I learnt to obtain the General Certificate of Education Ordinary (O/L) and Advanced (A/L) level was far from satisfactory for any African with an indigenous sympathy. Little did I know until I entered the university. Throughout secondary and high school I didn't like history as a subject that much probably because of the lengthy World Affairs and European History classes we were made to sit in, coupled with the overcrowded nature of most of those history classes. One lesson went on for three hours and some days we would have three in a row.

It is true that schooling often turns into a distinctly miserable experience for many young children when they find no relevance with what they are made to learn. This was exactly what was happening to me as the learners in Cameroon schools had no decision making power regarding curriculum choice. This was how I felt when any of my history teachers approached the door of the classroom. I kept questioning myself, the usefulness of European, Indian, Chinese or America history to us in black Africa and felt it would have been more interesting to study our own histories so that we could pass on this knowledge to our children and develop our own historical knowledge base.

I saw the strain with which our teachers delivered the only two units on Cameroon history which were part of the *Africa and the Middle East* paper and knew immediately that, the problem was that of poor mastery. The same scenario went on in the literature classes. Of the 25 books I had to read to pass Advanced Level literature only three were on Africa amongst which was one (in French literature) on Cameroon. I finished secondary and high school there (Government Bilingual Secondary (today High) School (GBHS) and the Cameroon College of Arts and Science (CCAS) respectively) specializing in History, Literature and French

Training to become a Historian at 'the Place to be'

From CCAS-Kumba, I applied to read journalism and Mass communication at the University of Buea having chaired the Press Club in my high school for two years. The admission list was read on national radio and I heard my name under the department of history. This was frustrating and I told my dad of my decision not to go to Buea only to be cautioned in the usual military tone that 'a degree is a degree'. I was only consoled by the fact that the same fate had befallen most of my friends and classmates in high school. We all proudly entered Buea (the place to be) with a head full of World Affairs and European History. However, contrary to our high school experience, the Department of History at UB was our first point of contact with a comprehensive task of compulsorily studying Cameroon and African history. This was really belated, coming in the 15th year of my school life. All along (primary, secondary and high school), major political events of the history of the country were merely narrated to us in passing. Most of the teachers were very

proficient in European history but the majority of them demonstrated a very shallow mastery of the local and national history. Of course, local history had hardly been part of their training as history students and teachers.

The Department of History was therefore my opening window. We studied pre-colonial Cameroon history, Colonial and Postcolonial Cameroon. So too was the case with African history. These lessons kept me wondering why throughout the primary, secondary and high school system in Cameroon, emphasis was more on the history of the outside world and Europe and what should be done about this. Even at the university, comparatively, a majority of the courses were not drawn from the local setting. Of the over thirty courses that were in the programme for the Bachelor degree in History, only four were Cameroon history courses. It was however an eye opener that Cameroon history actually had a content worthy of mastery. We thus left Buea with a sound knowledge of the political evolution of the country. Little attention was given to the economy and society.

Table 6: History Courses Offered at the University of Buea 1995-1998

Code	Course title	status
His 201	Introduction to Historical Knowledge	C
His 202	Africa and Archaeology	C
His 203	Pre-Colonial Cameroon	C
His 204	Cameroon 1884-1922	C
His 205	Africa to 1500	E
His 206	Africa 1500-1800	E
His 207	Industrial Revolution	E
His 208	Revolutions in Europe in the 19 th Century	E
His 209	Colonial America to 1776	E
His 210	Black Experience in America to 1865	E
His 211	A General survey of world History	E
His 301	Ancient Egyptian Civilization	C
His 302	Research Methodology	C
His 303	Cameroon 1922-1961	C
His 304	Cameroon 1961 to present	C
His 305	Africa in the 19 th century	E
His 306	Asia in the 20 th Century	E
His 307	Asia in the 19 th century	E
His 308	Africa in the 20 th century	E
His 312	Europe Between the Wars	E
His 401	History of political Thought	C
His 403	Seminar Topics in World History	C
His 404	Pan Africanism	E
His 405	History of International Organizations	E
His 406	Problems of Nation Building in Africa since Independence	E
His 407	The Middle East in the 20 th Century	E
His 408	Economic History of Africa	E
His 409	Ancient Civilizations Greek and Roman	C
His 498	Research Project	C

Source: *University of Buea Syllabus 1993, Summary of Students' Form B 1995/1996 Session*



The History Contents in Cameroon after the 1998 Education Law

After graduation in July 1998, I was lucky to find employment in the service of the Cameroon Baptist Convention as history, citizenship and geography teacher and Discipline Master of their newly created Baptist Secondary School in *Kumba* where my family had been living for over 20 years. It must be said that in the late 1990s, because of the economic crisis, for a graduate to pick a job in Cameroon was like a dog vainly wishing for the liver of a lion. As a young history teacher, fresh from university, and with a new perspective that I have gained from a detailed schooling on Cameroon history, I realized each time I thought about my primary, secondary and high school history programmes I felt very uneasy. In retrospect, I felt for the many unhappy students like myself who appeared from such classes ill-equipped to face local existence. It is said that for a teacher of unhappy children, the school experience is generally unhappy too.

From 1995, the year I entered university, some calls for the reform of the school system and the curriculum began to be heard in the country. A National education Forum was held in 1995 in which the issue of the curriculum took centre stage. Some of the Forum's rational held that;

There was a neglect of local and national cultural values in the education system. There were poorly adapted and overloaded programmes. Notwithstanding the different readjustments and reform attempts, the Cameroon education system has undergone, national realities have not always been taken into consideration as the system still reflects the two colonial systems Cameroon inherited. Cameroon is going through serious socio-political changes, the understanding and mastery of which require the adoption of an adequate education system that suits our local needs. Finally, the value attributed to national languages and cultures is not obvious within the system; consequently, some fundamental national values are either abandoned or rejected (cited in Tambo, 2003: 31-2).

The rational for the conference spoke directly to the need for policy and curriculum to be oriented towards a greater emphasis on the study of local contents in which ever field such a study was to be carried out. The outcome of the 1995 forum was the new education law No 98/004 of 14 April 1998 which defines Cameroons education policy till date. Like the 1995 Forum, part of the general provisions of the 1998 law stated that the objectives of education in Cameroon was to 'train citizens who are deeply rooted in their cultures'(Tambo, 2003: 121).

The policy itself did not pronounce on the nature of the school curricula but from the time of the holding of the 1995 Forum, efforts began to be made in terms of contents revision. The secondary education sector was the first to respond to the need to reform curriculum. In 1997, the General Certificate of Education Board, created in 1993, issued a new syllabus highlighting the importance of Cameroon history. It set up a three paper examination in which paper I was entirely Cameroon history while paper II and III were African and World History respectively. The History paper at both the GCE ordinary and advanced Levels was to be constituted of 40% Cameroon history, 30% African History and 30% World History as shown on figure five.

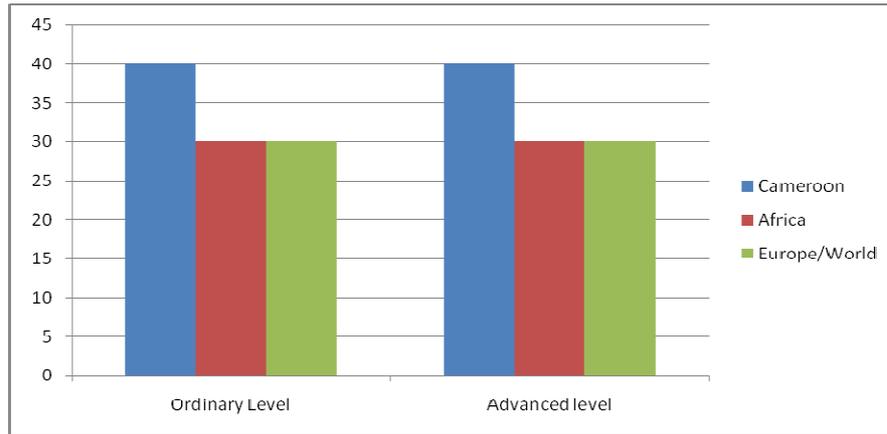


Figure 5: Distribution of Content between Cameroon, Africa and World History in the 1997 CGCEB Syllabus

The 1997 Syllabus was aimed at giving the candidates a solid background in Cameroon and African history, situated within the wider context of World History. It could therefore be said to have marked a significant departure from the European and World content dominated curriculum of the Ministry of National Education. It was also expected that the new syllabus would turn out, sharp, knowledgeable, broadminded and tolerant historians (citizens). To achieve this objective, the syllabus gave 40% rating to Cameroon history and 30% each for Africa and the world. Despite this structure, a careful count of the topics showed that the programme was still heavily loaded with World History.

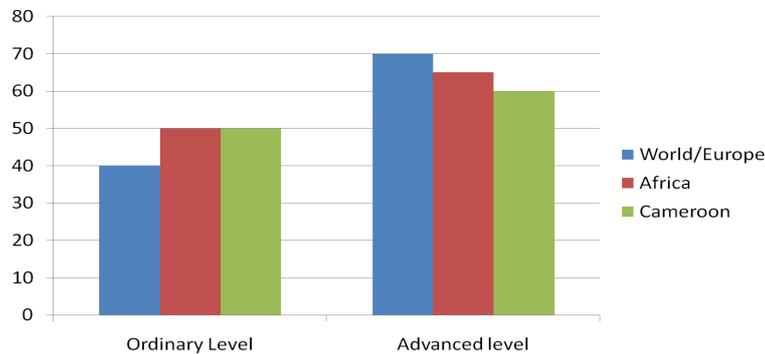


Figure 6

Equally, a new primary school curriculum was designed in 2001 with a conscious effort to intensify the study of Cameroon history. In the forward to the syllabuses, Professor Joseph Owona; Minister of National Education at the time amplified the importance of the new syllabus. He intimated that the document was the first ever in the history of Cameroon to be signed by a top ranking government official like the Minister of Education and that the debates leading to the setting up of the syllabuses started as far back as 1965. He also upheld the document for handling issues of relevance and efficiency (Preface to National Syllabuses for English Primary Schools, 2000). This could be seen in table 5.5 below.

Table 5.4 Summary of Content Distribution of the 2001 Syllabus

	Type of content/class	Class 4	Class 5	Class 6	Total	%
1	Cameroon History	25	33	26	84	64.1
2	African History	01	05	09	15	11.5
3	World/Europe	02	03	27	32	24.4
	Total	28	41	62	131	100

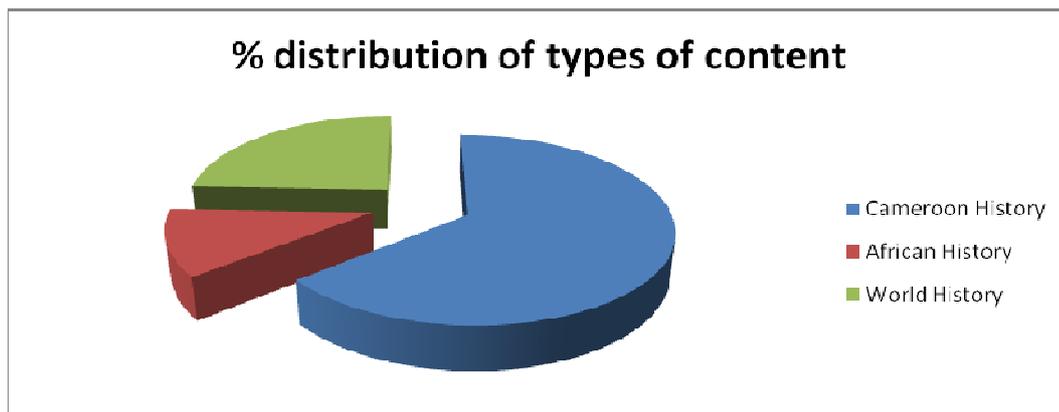


Figure 7

It is also worth mentioning that the high percentage recorded by Cameroon history in the 2001 syllabus (64.1%) as opposed to 11.5% for Africa and 24.4% for world history is not due to the increase in the content of different sectors of the history of Cameroon. Rather it is as a result of the misinterpretation of the principle of scope and sequence in curriculum development which has instead occasioned the repetition of the same content at different levels of the course. Evidently very little local input has been made from the 1965 programme and the same content is continuously recycled in each of the classes.

Why I must Unlearn to Relearn

Education for any society is often linked to the local realities and needs of that society. The educational policy of Cameroon clearly recognizes this goal when it states that the aim of education is to train citizens who are deeply rooted in their cultures. This goal of education tells curriculum designers to feature more of local contents than alien ones. For history, it calls for the study of Cameroonian local history than that of Europe and the rest of the world. From my study of history in primary, secondary and university, I have assessed that very little local history was studied. I have also explained that despite the reforms that came with the holding of the 1995 Education forum in the country, the history contents is still heavily dominated by foreign contents at the detriment of a profound understanding by young Cameroonians of the history of their country. Very little exists on the history of local Cameroonian communities.

The root of the problem lies with those who are called up to design curricula and the kind of background that they have in the field. A majority of those called up to design school programmes went through the curriculum which was established by the colonial authorities. To meet the objectives of colonialism, most colonial masters set up school programmes that emphasized the superiority of Europe. Africans were taught that they constituted no historical part of the world. This was an ideological distortion of reality, an incredible mythology as well as a historical and moral travesty which claimed that European cultures reflected the unique and progressive manifestation of the metaphysical order of history.

With Neocolonialism fully implanted, this mentality continued unabated by even those who championed the cause of independence. Neocolonialism is not mentioned here as the last stage of imperialism as Nkrumah believed but as the present global condition within subsists the postcolonial African world as a disciplined and shattered imagination of freedom. Neocolonialism underpins global Coloniality which currently flexes its muscles in the form of globalization; a phenomenon through which western particularistic ideas, values and traditions are being spread across the world as global

norms of epistemology. This has helped my understanding of the global power imbalances between Africans and Europeans and has revealed to me that within such a context, it is hard for today's curriculum reformers in Cameroon to break away from the norm or do better than they have done as African scholarship has also become hostage to western epistemological hegemony. This affected completely African intelligentsia on whose shoulders, the reform of things would have taken place. but have also heralded the achievements of colonial masters in bringing enlightenment to the people. Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2013:5) laments that

One of the strategies that have sustained the hegemony of the Euro-American-constructed world order *has been* its ability to make African intellectuals and academics socially located in Africa and on the oppressed side to think and speak epistemically and linguistically like the Euro-American intellectuals and academics on the dominant side. They *have* often failed to question the core logic of Western modernity that globalized Euro-North American views of the world and that constructed a racialized, heirarchical, hegemonic, patriachal and capitalist global social system. They *have* also failed to deeply engage with the delicate issues of African development and knowledge production which were never fully realized beyond some emancipatory pretensions during the colonial and early neo-colonial eras.

Because of this, there is a crisis of *a lack of essence*¹ which makes the African to continue to privilege Western knowledge and cosmologies. Until we realise this, and break away from it, there will hardly be a change in favour of indigenous local contents in schools.

This break which is urgent is what Samir Amin termed delinking; a necessary condition for the periphery to adopt new strategies and values that are different from those of the developed nations; a consistent refusal to bow to the dominant logic of the world capitalist system (Amin 2006:27); and the pursuit of a system of rational criteria for socio-economic options founded on a law of value on a national basis with popular relevance, independent of such criteria as flowing from the west operating on a world scale.

As a young teacher I I focused on the junior classes where it was possible to restructure the programme. I selected topics on local history, national and African history. This did not however go without opposition. The vice-principal kept insisting that I should respect the official syllabuses.

REFERENCES

1. Ibid, p.15

1. Ibid, p.15